



Town of Stow
PLANNING BOARD

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October 5, 2020

Bruce Wheeler
Habitech, Inc.
148 Park Street, Suite 3
North Reading, MA 01864

RE: Active Adult Neighborhood Bylaw Goals and Objectives

Dear Mr. Wheeler,

The purpose of the following letter is to communicate the refined goals and objectives of the Planning Board as it relates to updating the Active Adult Neighborhood bylaw in Stow, to provide feedback on the recently submitted concept plans and provide information on the most efficient next steps in the planning process.

Background

Habitech Inc.'s initial request this past winter regarded the Board's interest in increasing the restriction on the number of Active Adult Neighborhood (AAN) units allowed to be constructed in Stow. The Planning Board responded that such a request provided the opportunity to consider the AAN Zoning Bylaw as a whole, reflecting on the pros and cons of the existing developments now constructed, as well as the housing and conservation goals that have evolved since the time of the initial passage of the AAN bylaw nearly two decades ago.

Planning Process

Following up on the list of preliminary goals for a potential bylaw update, the Planning Board has begun the process of meeting with different stakeholders with expertise in housing and conservation. Based upon these discussions, and plans for upcoming public forums on the topic, the Planning Board is prepared to advance the discussion of a bylaw update, with the potential for bringing the bylaw to an upcoming Town Meeting.

Part 1 - Comments on Concept Plan

The Planning Board appreciates the effort that went into preparing the recently submitted concept plans. While the Planning Board was encouraged by several aspects of the plan, noted below, it does not believe that a development, based on that concept plan, is likely to be acceptable to residents or permitting boards in Stow.

Positive Elements of Concept Plan

- Incorporation of communal neighborhood design and central gathering space;
- Consideration of trees and vegetative buffers between pocket neighborhoods;
- Architectural designs that offers a diversity of housing styles;
- Varying unit sizes aimed at different market segments;
- Conceptual reuse of existing structures and attempt to reduce surface parking;
- Provision of Master Plan that reflects the developer's phasing of the buildout.

Negative Elements of Concept Plan

- Few opportunities for functional open space that provides high quality wildlife habitat, or connections to existing conservation areas and accessibility to the broader public;
- Fragmented open space falls short of the amount and orientation of open space required in the Active Adult Neighborhood Bylaw, Planned Conservation Development bylaw, or the Selectmen's Comprehensive Permit Policy;
- Number of units proposed is out of scale with current and historical development patterns in Stow;
- Number of units would create outsized burden regarding traffic impacts along Hudson Road.

Part 2 - Refined Bylaw Goals

The Planning Board would like to provide Habitech, Inc. with the following refined bylaw development goals. The Board has considered the AAN district as a whole, with the understanding that any revised bylaw may be utilized on other parcels within the Overlay District.

Goal #1

Requiring a greater diversity of housing types, including but not limited to variations in the number of bedrooms, floor plans, square footage, as well as unit types, including single family, multi-family and cottage housing types to encourage opportunities for downsizing seniors.

Performance Standards Being Considered

- At least 33% of units will contain floor plans with a square footage below 2000 square feet;
- Bylaw retains 66 unit neighborhood allowance and cap raised accordingly;
- Units/acre calculations raised as applicable to account for increased open space.

Goal #2

Focusing on age-targeted units with universal accessibility features to aid older adults in aging in place and avoid future oversupply of age restricted units.

Performance Standards Being Considered

- Developer has option to utilize age restriction. All units proposed, whether unrestricted or not, shall meet specific age targeting design criteria, including but not limited to:
 - First floor master bedrooms and en-suite bathrooms;
 - Zero step entrance;
 - ADA accessible doorways and entranceways;
 - Bathrooms equipped for those with mobility impairments and to encourage aging in place

- Opportunities for safe walking within and adjacent to the site on accessible surfacing.

Goal #3

Requiring a greater percentage of Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) qualifying affordable units, as well as middle income units to provide for income restrictions at various levels;

Performance Standards Being Considered

- Inclusionary Housing requirement raised to 15% of units meeting the SHI criteria;
- 5% of units required to be restricted to moderate income levels of ~150% AMI
 - The Planning Board will consider adding language that allows for a waiver from the requirement to provide middle income restricted units where the developer will commit to building the required Subsidized Housing Inventory eligible units;
- All units meeting the affordability restrictions to be counted on the Town's SHI will allow children, in accordance with the Department of Housing and Community Development's policy;

Goal #4

Adoption of Open Space provisions similar to those found in the Planned Conservation Development section of the Zoning Bylaw to encourage thoughtful planning of the required open space;

Performance Standards Being Considered

- Upland Open Space of ~50 % required, calculated based on the upland area of the site;
- Units per acre shall be calculated using developable site area;
- Design process (excluding proof plan) in Section 8.5 – Planned Conservation Developments, incorporated as practicable;
- *See attached map for reference.

Comments in this letter regarding the adequacy of the concept plan's open space were derived in part from a meeting in September with the Conservation Commission and Open Space Committee. There was agreement that more intact and unfragmented open space lands should be provided that will have greater value for habitat and public use and be easier to manage. Of particular interest are the southwestern parcels, abutting the Hale/Corzine conservation land, and containing high quality upland habitat. Such open space would help connect the Hale/Corzine land to the Whispering Woods Open Space and ultimately to an extension of the Stow Emerald Necklace Trail system, providing benefits to residents and the general public.

Goal #5

Development of accessible, vibrant, community inspired neighborhoods that utilize communal spaces and landscape architecture to provide inviting spaces for neighborhood events, as well as opportunities for shared recreation and healthy aging in place.

Performance Standards Being Considered

- Public Trail requirements that offer connections within the neighborhood as well as to adjoining neighborhoods and conserved lands as practicable;

- Required indoor community space, including but not limited to common kitchens and gathering spaces;
- Required outdoor communal space, which may be incorporated into the open space, including but not limited to community gardens, parks or recreational amenities.
- Use of existing vegetation to provide buffers between pocket neighborhoods and create interior trail options;
- Incorporation of architectural designs that reflect the broader agricultural and historical New England aspect of Stow.

Part 3 -Next Steps

To advance the process further, the Planning Board will continue to draft a bylaw update based upon these goals. The Planning Board will present its considerations for residents, boards and committees through this fall and winter. The Board would like to work with you on developing a Bylaw that might serve as a framework for your development of this site and encourages your continued feedback throughout this process.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Jesse Steadman
Town Planner

Cc: Stow Municipal Affordable Housing Trust
Stow Conservation Commission
Stow Open Space Committee